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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Venezuela

SUBJECT Ports of Caripito/Hydrographic Information/Sailing
Information/Pilotage and Berthing/Port FacilitiesPLACE ACQUIRED
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1. Hydrographic and Sailing Information: The port of Caripito is located 51 miles up the San Juan River. Light beacons are maintained in the river by the Creole Petroleum Company as far as Caripito, making the river safely navigable at night. There are at least five fathoms of water at any point in the river channel. The rise and fall of tide is 14 feet. Due to the danger of collision, no vessel is allowed to pass another between Caripito and Marietta Point. Therefore, vessels sometimes have to wait at Guiría for another vessel to pass down the stream and, conversely, vessels sometimes have to wait at Caripito for a vessel to come up the river. Such movements are under the direct control, by radio telephone, of the Marine Department at Caripito. The channel across Maturín Bar is marked by 32 light buoys. Due to continuous dredging operations by Creole, the channel now has an average depth of 32 feet at high water. Present port regulations prohibit a loaded vessel from drawing more than 31'6" when crossing the bar. Vessels drawing up to 22 feet may cross the bar at any stage of the tide.
2. Pilotage and Berthing: Approaching Caripito, a government pilot is taken on at Guiría. Mooring masters from Creole relieve the government pilot at San Juan Light #31, and supervise the turning and docking of the vessel. Vessels sometimes dock bow upstream and sometimes bow downstream depending on various circumstances such as tide, stowage of cargo, and availability of berth. If a vessel docks bow downstream, it has to proceed up the river about a mile past the dock to the turning basin, with the mooring master in charge. For quick undocking, it is desirable to have the vessel docked bow downstream. Undocking is also under the direction of the mooring master, who accompanies the vessel down the river as far as light #31; where he disembarks in a company launch, and a government pilot takes over. Tugs are not necessary for safe docking or anchoring at Caripito. Government pilots

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charge Bolívars 100 for taking a vessel over two thousand tons up or down the San Juan River between 0600 and 1800. Should pilotage start or finish after 1800 but before 2300 the above rate is doubled. If pilotage starts or terminates after 2300 the above rate is increased 150%.

3. Dock Facilities: The port of Caripito is owned and operated by the Creole Petroleum Company. The docks, piers, and all floating and rolling equipment, with the exception of a few lights, are the property of Creole. The cargo dock and three tanker berths are situated on the south bank of the San Juan River. The depth of the water alongside the cargo dock is about 24 feet at low water, although this depth is decreasing gradually due to silting in and around the pilings of the pier. The cargo dock is 350 feet long. It is equipped with a narrow gauge railroad which conveys the cargo from shipside to the Creole warehouse, which is 5 kilometers from the river. All cargo is landed directly on to flatcars from ship's tackle. However, the upriver end of the dock is equipped with a revolving crane of 15 tons capacity; and this crane, using its light set of tackle, is generally employed to lift cargo out of the hatches and land it directly on the flat cars. The dock can accommodate but one vessel at a time and, due to its short length, cannot receive cargo from a large vessel from more than three hatches at a time. For example: a C-1 type vessel can work only three contiguous hatches at a time, which could be hatches #1, #2, and #3; or #2, #3, and #4; or #3, #4, and #5. Although up until now all cargo has been discharged onto flatcars, plans are underway to eliminate the railroad and to reconstruct the floor of the dock to permit the passage of tractors and trailers. Once tractors and trailers are put into operation, the cargo will be transported to two new warehouses which are already built adjacent to the dock. Only one half of the dock can be reconstructed at a time. This means that once the elimination of the railroad is actually underway, the dock will be able to receive cargo from only two hatches simultaneously until reconstruction is completed.
4. Cargo Handling: About 90% of the cargo discharged at Caripito is consigned to Creole. This cargo is discharged free of expense to the vessel during a 16-hour working day. Cargo not consigned to Creole is discharged into lighters, either alongside the dock or while the vessel is anchored up the river. Cargo not consigned to Creole is handled exclusively by a firm called Montagliione. This firm supplies the stevedores and lightermen, as well as the lighters, and then bills the consignees. Cargo consigned to Creole is let out to a stevedoring contractor who is paid a flat rate on a tonnage basis. The stevedores work well, and the supervision is excellent. Rates of discharge for various commodities are as follows: cement, bentonite, etc - 30 tons per gang hour; heavy oil well equipment and supplies - 40 tons per gang hour; pipe - 25 tons per gang hour; general cargo - 15 tons per gang hour. If a vessel requests that overtime be worked to obtain a faster dispatch, all expenses incidental to such overtime are charged to the vessel. This includes not only the personnel on board and on the docks but also in the warehouses, and it is a very costly item. Overtime work is all actual work after midnight and on Sundays and holidays.
5. Repair Facilities: Only repairs of a minor nature can be carried out at Caripito. Creole has a fleet of two boats and launches and some diving equipment, but there is no equipment suitable for deep sea salvage.
6. Medical Facilities: There is a modern hospital located in the camp at Caripito which is available to crew members and passengers.
7. Provisions: Fresh vegetables and groceries are available in very limited quantities and are quite expensive. Bunker "C" and diesel oil are available at the cargo dock.
8. Town of Caripito: The population of Caripito as of 1951 was about 28 thousand persons. This includes all persons living in oil company camps. The only foreign consulate at Caripito is the British one.

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